

MASSACHUSETTS PAROLE BOARD: SPECIAL REPORT



Massachusetts Parole Board Three-Year Recidivism Analysis: 2009

Shawna M. Andersen, Research and Planning Specialist

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to examine recidivism among Massachusetts offenders. Inmates who discharged from state or county correctional facilities in 2009, with no subsequent parole supervision, are compared to Massachusetts parolees who discharged from community supervision in 2009. The recidivism rates of both cohorts, as well as time to recidivism, severity of re-offense, and length of sentence for reincarceration are examined.

Methods

In the present report, recidivism is defined as incarceration upon conviction of a new offense (i.e., felony or misdemeanor) in Massachusetts.¹ A three-year follow-up period, from the date of discharge (i.e., from parole or from custody) is used to measure recidivism.

There are two samples included in this evaluation. The first is a parolee sample, which is comprised of offenders who discharged from parole supervision in 2009. Parolees were in the community at the time of discharge, the sample excludes parolees who discharged from custody (e.g., while serving another sentence, from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, from another state's or federal warrant, from a temporary parole detainer). Individuals that were paroled to community supervision in another state are also excluded from the sample. Finally, because offenders who are sentenced to life do not discharge from parole, by virtue of their sentence, they are also not assessed as part of this report.

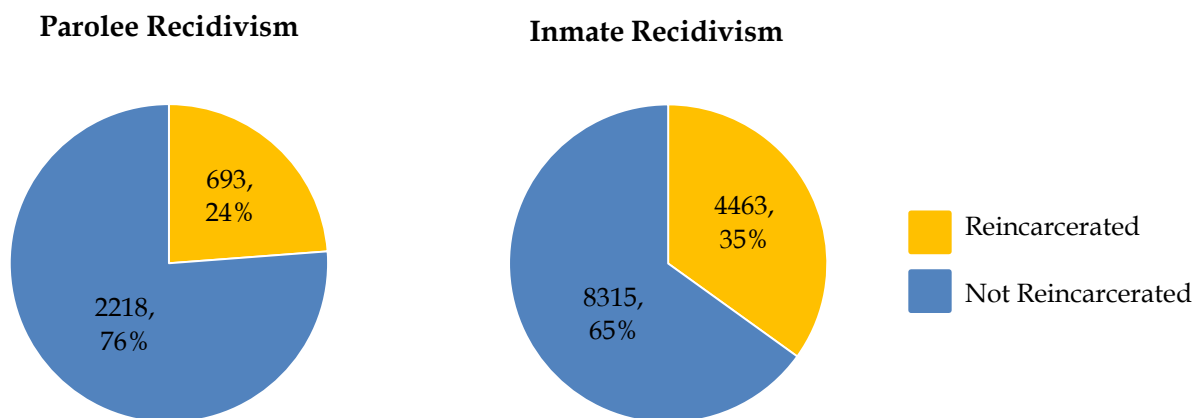
The second sample in this analysis is composed of inmates, which includes offenders who discharged from a state or county correctional facility in 2009. Discharge occurs at the completion of one's sentence (i.e., adjusted maximum date). Those who are released to parole are not included in the inmate sample. Rather, they would be part of the parolee sample upon sentence completion. However, inmates may discharge from custody with a subsequent period of supervised release on probation; these offenders are included in the inmate sample. The Massachusetts Department of Correction reported that, in 2009, 706 offenders were released from state facilities with a term of probation supervision (i.e., not including those with parole supervision).² After excluding parolees, this number represents approximately 42% of released offenders. Therefore, it is plausible that the inmate sample represented in this report includes a substantial proportion of offenders on probation supervision during the follow-up period.

The data for this analysis is drawn from the State Parole Integrated Records and Information Tracking System (SPIRIT). Cohort analyses and recidivism analyses can be captured through information entered into the Parole Board's database.

Results

The total sample consists of 15,689 offenders, 2,911 of which were parolees at the time of discharge and 12,778 of which were inmates at the time of discharge. Of these offenders, 5,156 (32.9%) were incarcerated after a new conviction, within three years of discharge. This represents a recidivism rate of approximately one-third of the total sample.

Of 2,911 parolees that successfully discharged from parole, 693 (23.8%) recidivated within three years. In comparison, 4,463 (34.9%) of 12,778 inmates recidivated over the same time period. The difference between recidivism rates for inmates and parolees (11.1 percentage points) is statistically significant ($p < .01$).



The next analysis examines time to recidivism (i.e., reincarceration upon new conviction). Results indicate that the parolee sample was slower to recidivate than the inmate sample. Within one year of discharge, 48.3% of all inmate recidivists were reincarcerated, whereas 35.8% of parolee recidivists were reincarcerated in the same time period. A similar pattern can be observed within a two year period from discharge (i.e., 80.9% for inmates and 71.9% for parolees). The difference in swiftness to recidivate between inmates and parolees provides further support for the effectiveness of community supervision.

The following two charts display time to recidivism data for inmates and parolees that discharged in 2009. The cumulative percentages represent the proportion of all recidivists (i.e., inmate or parolee) that were reincarcerated within one year, within two years, and within three years. Because this analysis includes up to three years of re-offense data, all recidivating parolees and recidivating inmates (100%) were reincarcerated by the third year. However, as previously described, differences in year one and year two indicate that parolees are slower to recidivate than inmates.

Parolee Time to Reincarceration		
Time from Discharge (Years)	Count	Cumulative Percentage
1	248	35.8%
2	250	71.9%
3	195	100.0%
Total	693	100.0%

Inmate Time to Reincarceration		
Time from Discharge (Years)	Count	Cumulative Percentage
1	2157	48.3%
2	1455	80.9%
3	851	100.0%
Total	4463	100.0%

Aside from prevalence of recidivism and time to reincarceration, severity of re-offense is another important outcome to consider. Based on offense categories, as classified by the Parole Board's database, the first event of recidivism (i.e., first reincarceration upon new conviction) is grouped by the governing offense.³ A comparison of the most serious new offense for inmates and parolees discharging from supervision is provided below.

Recidivism Offense Category				
Offense Category	Inmates		Parolees	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Crimes Against the Person	1300	29.1%	162	23.4%
Sex Offenses with Registration Required	126	2.8%	5	0.7%
Crimes Against Property	1403	31.4%	258	37.2%
Controlled Substances Violations	677	15.2%	126	18.2%
Motor Vehicle Offenses	394	8.8%	68	9.8%
Crimes against Public Peace/Government/Health	106	2.4%	24	3.5%
Other/Unknown	457	10.2%	50	7.2%
Total	4463	100.0%	693	100.0%

Approximately 32% of re-offenses among inmates are either crimes against people or sex crimes (i.e., sex offenses with registration required), as compared to 24% of parolees' re-offenses. In contrast, parolees were convicted for a greater proportion of controlled substances and motor vehicle violations, as compared to their inmate counterparts. Based on crime category, it appears that discharged inmates commit relatively more violent offenses than discharged parolees.

In addition to crime categories of the most serious offense, the sentence length of the most serious offense may be indicative of crime severity. Discharged inmates, without parole supervision, were reincarcerated for sentences that averaged 650 days. Parolees' sentences upon reincarceration averaged 598 days. Therefore, it can be concluded that discharged inmates committed more serious re-offenses, based on longer resulting sentences, than discharged parolees.

Conclusion

In comparing inmates who discharged from Massachusetts state and county correctional facilities in 2009 to Massachusetts parolees who discharged from community supervision in the same year, it is evident that these populations display disparate criminal behavior upon release. Inmates are more likely to recidivate, tend to reoffend more quickly upon release, are reconvicted for more serious offenses, and receive longer sentences upon reincarceration than parolees. In conclusion, it appears that parolees are more likely to be rehabilitated upon discharge from supervision than inmates who do not receive parole supervision.

¹The Parole Board's data does not include new incarcerations with a sentence of less than 60 days. Therefore, recidivism as defined in this report, excludes these short term sentences.

²Massachusetts Department of Correction: Research and Planning Division (2010). *Prison Population Trends 2009*. Retrieved from <http://www.mass.gov/eopss/docs/doc/research-reports/pop-trends/prison-pop-trends-2009.pdf>

³The governing offense, as defined in this report, is the potential most serious offense. Determination of the governing offense is based on sentence length and offense order on the mittimus.